

A rapid review of studies on COVID-19 and gender equality in agriculture

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Research on COVID-19 and the social, economic, food and health ramifications of this pandemic is rapidly emerging from many disciplines. There is strong evidence from reports, peer-reviewed papers and working papers demonstrating the disproportionately negative economic impact of COVID-19 on women compared to men. Concerns about roll back of advances in gender equality and the gendered impacts of the pandemic have been raised from its early stages and research is increasingly beginning to consider the role gender plays in these relationships. Gendered impacts of COVID-19 included an increase in violence against women, unpaid labor, disproportionate levels of unemployment, and increased barriers to ensuring food and nutrition security and food systems for the vulnerable and marginalized communities globally.

It is being highlighted that we risk a global food emergency that will affect a large section of the most vulnerable and marginalized population and have long term impacts. Food production is slowing down in some countries, reduced incomes and rising prices leading to diminished access to food. COVID-19 is expected to increase the stress on food systems and affect their resilience, making many people more vulnerable to any future crises affecting the food system. The pandemic has demonstrated that a deeper delve into understanding gender dynamics in food systems and a strengthening of women's role and agency is important to ensure that such shocks can be minimized and food and nutrition security is not compromised. From a policy perspective, it is important to continue to study the phenomenon from a multi disciplinary approach in order to:

- Identify more widespread trends of the impact on food systems
- Design gender responsive research, programs and policies, and
- Underline the need for greater focus on issues of gender and COVID-19

A rapid mapping of the on-going, planned and completed research work has been carried out using information available online and collected from CG centers. While this might not be the most comprehensive mapping, it was adequate to highlight the patterns and gaps both in thematic areas and regional coverage. Due to the mobility restrictions, much of the research employed phone based surveys and SMS to interact with respondents, with a few conducted face to face. Secondary data and global big data sets have been extensively utilized to provide the context. Generally both qualitative and quantitative methods were used.

The main themes that emerged could be categorized as: socio economic impact; labor; employment; unpaid care work; food and nutrition insecurity; livelihoods;



women's groups'; food systems; social norms; behavioral responses; gendered impacts, migration; women's businesses. Some of the research overlaps on thematic areas adding value and identifying potential areas for further exploration.

Looking at gender focused or sex-disaggregated analyses in CGIAR, IFPRI has been looking at coping strategies, well-being impacts of the pandemic and lockdowns on men, women and their families and, changes in gendered gaps in household work and employment opportunities. ICRISAT is taking stock of the impact of the lockdown on food security, livelihoods and, government programs in India for women and men. CIP is studying impacts on women entrepreneurs in Vietnam and short term impacts on food security; livelihoods and government programs on potato farmers in the highlands of Peru. CIFOR and Alliance BI-CIAT are looking at the impact on women in different agro value chains like shea and bean value chains. ILRI is studying changes in household management of pig rearing and value chain upgrading due to the pandemic. IITA is documenting the impact on livelihoods, resilience and women's engagement in markets in agro food chains like gari, cowpea and tomato. ICARDA is studying gender dimensions of use of digital extension in North Africa. IRRI is looking at the impact on wages for women and men in India. WorldFish is synthesizing available strategies for maintaining quality in R4D during COVID and other shocks.

Few CGIAR studies have focused on analyzing gender dynamics and relations in agricultural and food systems contexts. Much research stayed at the use of sex disaggregated data and gender analysis of a few variable like access to nutritious food or difference in wage. The use of gender and social relations frameworks, intersectional lens or feminist analysis, in differentiated social and economic structures is conspicuously missing in most of the work.

Literatures coming in from INGOs have used mainly virtual platforms and technology to conduct their research in the initial days of Covid-19. The research that is ongoing till 2021 visualize direct interface with the respondents.

ACAPS GENDER & COVID-19 series documents, through a rapid assessment and secondary data, focusing mainly on countries that had a humanitarian crisis ongoing. The research identified a much higher impact the current health and economic crisis has on women compared to men in certain livelihoods aspects and on housing, land and property issues. They have effectively used the intersectionality lens which impact humanitarian needs, livelihood opportunities, coping strategies, and individual responses. The HIVOS rapid assessment on women in the horticulture sector in Kenya, identified intensified unpaid work, contravention of labor laws, compromising safety in search of food for their families and the impact on the sector from the European markets shutting down all imports. The SEWA Women's cooperatives and Covid-19 study, studies how cooperatives have both been affected by and coped with the crisis as it aims to understand the role of collective enterprises as a support mechanism for informal women workers during a crisis.



Integrated Pest Management amid COVID-19: Impacts, Constraints, and Adaptations carried out by Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Integrated Pest Management, studies experiences of farmers and researchers collaborating with the IPM IL and identifies access to inputs and services are being affected as men have returned to the homesteads, displaced urban landless women workers returning to the villages in search of work and the lack of rural employment thus exacerbating rural poverty.

At the academic level, many of the research carried out are in partnership with other universities and are spread over a period of time. The information available in the links are either of completed research or on-going. Some of the researches are written up as blogs or articles.

The baseline results of the Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on agriculture and food security in India conducted by the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, CSA and PHFI, identified the impacts on agricultural production, livelihoods, food security, and diet diversity of small and marginal farmers. There is no gender analysis carried out.

Covid-19 Livelihoods Survey by Azim Premji University looked at the impact on the livelihoods and earnings of India's workforce/labor and migrants. The Delhi School of Economics, NY University, World Bank, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies analyzed how Indian households were coping with the economic and psychological effects of the lockdown, and other covariate shocks. The School of Women and Gender Studies, College of Humanities & Social Sciences (CHUSS) Makerere University, studied in Uganda, how changes in masculinities be an effective response to gender based violence during COVID-19 and future pandemics. Department of Sociology, Monk Prayogshala, studied the impact of reverse migration in the times of Covid-19 in India. Univ of Warwick and J-PAL South Asia, focused on the impact of the lockdown on interstate migrant workers, and to gauge their willingness to migrate again in the future.

Presidency University, India, Institute of Development Studies, University of Leeds studied the impact of the Indian lockdown following the outbreak of COVID-19 on dietary practices of women and their children in rural Bihar, financial status of household, and access to government schemes, and quantify the resultant change in their welfare. Penn university looked at how local food systems are linked to social and solidarity, economy, financial systems for the most vulnerable in Mexico. University of East Anglia's Global Research Translation Award (GRTA) had several blogs on different aspects of Indian food systems on their website and the impact on the rural poor. Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford, UK and International Development Research Centre, Nairobi, Kenya looked at how gender interacts with implemented measures and the implications for food security in Africa.

A number of studies have been carried out by The World Bank. The Development Data Group has studied at the household, individual, and child levels, the



socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic and the policies implemented to slow the spread of the virus - by decisions by governments and international aid organizations. They have used eight-question Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) in Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, Sub-Saharan Africa. IDA in Myanmar has looked at the pandemic and related containment measures have been disrupting economic activity with households falling into poverty. They have also look at the impact of Covid-19 in Vietnam and the resultant lockdown efforts on vulnerable sections of the society and the accessibility of government relief measures. UN Women did a rapid assessment on the gendered consequences of Covid-19 in the Asia Pacific region through a phone survey in the early days of the spread of the virus. An article by them analyzed how women small business owners in South Sudan bore the brunt of COVID-19 as their livelihoods shrunk. These women were also members in the small savings groups which have been able to help them a bit but the future of their business plans were in doubt to the impact. UN Women and UNEP carried out a rapid assessment to understand the impacts of the crisis on the livelihoods and well-being of rural women (farmers, fisherwomen and entrepreneurs reliant on natural resources) in Cambodia. IFAD writes in an article about why it is important to safeguard and accelerate progress by putting rural women center stage.

What has emerged through the inventory are important areas that need further research to substantiate the current discourse on the impact of the virus on gender dynamics that affect food production and systems.

In terms of target groups, there is inadequate information related to how indigenous people are being affected by the virus including other vulnerable groups like the elderly farming households who rely on outside labour and support and female headed households who by virtue of their social status, lack access to information and resources.

In terms of geographical coverage, West, East, South, and Central Africa have been covered to some extent, while information from North Africa is limited. Research emerging from South Asia (India, Nepal and Bangladesh) focuses on the economy, migration, food supply chain and women's collectives. Very little information was available from South east Asian and Pacific countries. Research from MENA and South America appears to be limited, but this could be due to the limitations of accessing this work on the internet due to language barriers.

At an economic level, there is also a need for more rapid data gathering and assessment on the extent to which women are more vulnerable to losing their jobs or suffering reduced wages as a result of formal austerity measures. Additionally, we need more studies on gender and the impact of various policies during crises. Gender analysis has been conspicuously missing from policy debates, documents, and processes. There is also a gap in our understanding of which gender-specific measures may have worked in the past. There is some discussion on the role of international bodies like UN Women in ensuring that national governments commit



to certain goals but studies are limited in regard to the pathways to influence states.

As women tend to play an important role in promoting hygiene routines within the household and caring for family members, their access to reliable sources of COVID-19 information is particularly essential. As most of the information was shared through social media sites or phone services, those without access had a seemingly bigger challenge. This digital divide also translated into difficulties to conduct phone surveys to ascertain sensitive gender issues such as violence against women or their access to legal support during the pandemic if the need required. Information is needed not only about the digital divide in general, but also on whether there is equal access to connectivity in households in a context where more people are home regularly. Information across all these areas is urgently needed to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of women and girls.

More research is needed on the role of women's collectives to help meet health, food and economic needs of women and families during the pandemic, given evidence of the role of women's groups in this regard and prior research documenting the importance of women's groups in crisis. Their access and decision making over natural resources becomes all the more imperative in the face of looming food insecurity during and after the pandemic.

Existing gender gaps are exacerbating the implementation of social protection schemes to support women and girls during the pandemic. Data on the impact of an epidemic on female employment could help influence our design of better targeted social protection programs and cash transfers, relief measures, influence behavior change campaigns on distribution of care giving responsibilities and women's agency, and create improved fiscal policies for building the resilience of the marginalized and vulnerable groups.

There is inadequate research on reverse migration, due to lockdowns, and its impact on rural areas and women who were responsible for agriculture since most of the men had migrated. These changes have added to the burden of the rural areas to provide for the additional people both in terms of food security as well as employment. The migrants are generally unprotected poor who not only do not have access to health programs and medical services due to lack of money or basic health insurance, but can also spread the infection to their families and rural communities because they live in fear and don't get treatment or don't seek treatment if they get sick. This reverse migration needs to be studied to understand its impact on rural farming household livelihood strategies and portfolios, changing social norms, women's agency and empowerment including women's agri-business enterprises that have suffered a great deal.

At the household level, changes in the gender dynamics, and the consequences for resilience, food and nutrition security, livelihood portfolios, incomes, indebtedness, employment, labor and, various dimensions of women's empowerment,



perceptions of masculinity and care work need to be further explored. These changes, intra household as well as the changes in the larger society will have far reaching impacts on their roles in roles and power relations in agri-food systems affecting availability, access, utilization and stability in pre and post pandemic situations which need to be further studied.

